

Message Text

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12

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FM AMEMBASY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8941

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASY SEOUL

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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USMISSION OECD PARIS

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E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: ELAB, JA

SUBJ: SPRING LABOR OFFENSIVE

REF: TOKYO 3617

SUMMARY. A NEW GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL AND A LAST MINUTE ROUND OF BARGAINING LATE MARCH 26 WERE SUCCESSFUL IN FORESTALLING A NATIONWIDE TRANSPORTATION STRIKE SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 27. AVOIDANCE OF THE STRIKE AND RESLUTANT INCONVENIENCE TO MILLIONS OF COMMUTERS IS LIKELY TO BE VIEWED AS A MODEST NET PLUS FOR THE MIKI ADMINISTRATION. UNIONS AND JSP MAY ALSO HAVE MADE MINOR GAINS BECAUSE STRIKE WAS AVERTED. END SUMMARY.

1.

GOVERNMENT PROMISE TO HAVE ADVISORY COUNCIL CONSIDER LABOR AND OPPOSITION PART DEMANDS FOR A NATIONWIDE MINIMUM WAGE AND SERIES OF MEETINGS DURING THE EVENING OF
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MARCH 26 RATIFYING AN EARLIER PRIVATE AGREEMENT PROVIDED

SUFFICIENT JUSTIFICATION TO PERMIT TRANSPORTATION UNIONS TO CALL OFF THEIR PLANNED TWENTY-FOUR HOUR STRIKE SET FOR MARCH 27. LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES UNION (JICHIRO) AND OTHER OTHER UNIONS FOLLOWED SUIT AND CANCELLED PLANNED STRIKE ACTIVITIES. THIS ENDED THE FIRST ROUND OF THE ANNUAL SPRING LABOR "STRUGGLE" WITH A BREAK FOR MILLIONS OF COMMUTERS AND

THEIR EMPLOYERS. WHILE INDIVIDUAL UNIONS MAY STRIKE LATER IN THE SPRING TO INDERSCORE PARTICULAR WAGE DEMANDS, THERE NOW APPEARS LITTLE LIKLIHOOD OF FURTHER NATIONWIDE STRIKES WITH POLITICAL AS WELL AS ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS. AS FOR THE BROAD PUBLIC SECTOR WAGE SETTLEMENT ITSELF, A LABOR MINISTRY OFFICIAL TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARCH 26 THAT AGREEMENT WOULD NOT BE REACHED UNTIL FALL "AFTER THE US ECONOMY BEGAN ITS UPTURN IN JULY."

2. AMONG THE UNSPOKEN REASONS FOR CALLING OFF THE STRIKE WERE LABOR'S CURRENTLY WEAK POSITION IN A RECESSIONARY SITUATION, ITS FEAR OF AROUSING PUBLIC IRE WHICH WOULD WORK TO THE MANAGEMENT/GOVERNMENT'S ADVANTAGE, AND OPPOSITION PARTY CONCERN THAT THERE WOULD BE ADVERSE SPILLOVER IN THE UPCOMING (MID-PARIL) NATIONWIDE PREFECTURAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS. THE SUCCESS OF THE MIKI ADMINISTRATION, REPRESENTED IN THE MAIN BY LABOR MINISTER HASEGAWA, IN AVOIDING CONFRONTATION AND AVERTING THE STRIKE--DESPITE SOME SENTIMENT IN THE LDP AND ELSEWHERE TO PROVOKE IT -- APPEARS TO US A MODEST BUT SIGNIFICANT PLUS FOR MIKI. AT SAME TIME, SOHYO, CHURITSUOREN AND JSP WILL BE ABLE TO CLAIM THAT BY MAKING SOME PROGRESS ON MINIMUM WAGE ISSUE THEY HAVE PROMOTED DESIRES NOT ONLY OF UNION MEMBERS BUT UNORGANIZED WORKERS AS WELL. THIS TOO APPEARS TO BE MODEST PLUS. IN SHORT, EVERYBODY SEEMS HAPPY WITH OUTCOME OF NEGOTIATIONS WHICH AVERTED STRIKE.

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